THOREAU'S WALDEN: A NATURE-MYTH

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All beauty, all music, all delight springs from apparent dualism but real unity. —Thoreau

Thoreau's Walden is not fully intelligible without an attempt to clarify the reasons for his Walden experience in the simple economy with thought and life in terms of its practical, moral, religious, and aesthetic tendencies. Indeed he had some reasons: in the first place, his ardent desire for spiritual independence. The nature lover set out to build his hut in March 1845, and began to live there at Walden on July 4, which, by accident, was America's independence day as well as his own, and left there on September 6, 1847. Indeed, he carried out the experiment for the fulfilment of his life, for his soul's ideal of self-culture, the perfect unfolding of his individual nature, as was suggested in Frederick Henry Hedge's essay on "The Art of Life,—the Scholar's Calling." To quote Thoreau's own statement:

"I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. . . ."

(81)^2

In the journal entry of July 6, 1845, he says:

"I wish to meet the facts of life—the vital facts, which are the phenomena

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or actuality the gods meant to show us—face to face, and so I came down here.¹

Indeed, he always attempted to grasp the close correspondence, the organic harmony between a fact in nature and a truth about human experience. It suggested to some extent the dualism of "spirit" and "nature." It is noteworthy, however, that "spirit" or "soul" for Thoreau should be considered simply to mean "self." Indeed, his whole life was a quest for the ultimate Reality of his own self. Though the external world or the universe is a reality, the real in it is Man's own Self alone. "Be it life or death," he says in Walden, "we crave only reality." Really he wanted to come down to "a hard bottom and rocks in place—which we can call reality" (88). To be in contact with "reality" is to have established one's life on the basis of the facts in nature and the truths about his experience. He can find reality nowhere outside himself. Pure expansion of the pure self was for Thoreau metaphorically identified with exploration of nature. If one finds his own self, he finds reality. If he finds reality, he has found the universe. Thoreau aimed to find the ultimate Reality of his own self by taking Nature, as it were, to wife, in having a margin of full leisure in his Walden experiment. To put it in another way, he wished to find an affirmative answer to the question of his individual existence, to win at Walden some meaning and autonomy for his own individual self, as is suggested in such a passage as follows: "Life! who knows what it is, what it does?"² Does this rhetorical question suggest his negative attitude toward life? No; it rather indicates his very positive attitude toward life and existence.

For Thoreau the success of his spiritual life, i.e., self-culture, was closely related to the success of his material experiment (experience). After his graduation from Harvard he became in-

² Italics mine.
³ Cf. L. Lane, op. cit., p. 20; journal of July 6, 1845; Ethel Seybold, Thoreau: The Quest and the Classics. New Haven, 1951, p. 50.
creasingly convinced that his quest for the noble aim of self-culture was incompatible with a profit-centered civilization, and his cultural disobedience, so to speak, led him to leave those luxuries or superfluities of existence which most of his contemporaries regarded as its necessities, going to the pond to devote himself to the "higher" goal of self-culture, i.e., to find the essential principle of his integral existence, as will be discussed later on, not to possess things.

One may well consider Thoreau, an excellent classicist educated by the Greek and Latin classics, to have attempted to realize such a Greek pattern of life as "a stern and more than Spartan simplicity of life," (83) or such a type of contemplative life as the Orientals advised him to live (102), or such a kind of primitive life as the American Indians lived (70). My thinking moves, however, on the assumption that his experiment by the pond was, properly interpreted, a self-renewal ceremony or ritual. It is assumed to be a fact that Thoreau yielded to the pull of his unconscious death-wishes, as Freud later called, or the nothingness of nirvana, which is the goal of the willful ego in Schopenhauer, or the negative moment, so to say, in Hegelianism, and died at least a symbolic death to renew himself and become more nearly perfect through a spiritual rebirth, as an effort to lay an adequate foundation for the pursuit of self-culture. It is noteworthy in this connection that he believed that the Spirit of Life, or Life Principle does not die. We may well say that he performed a dramatic reorientation in the forces of his life in hopes that he would write a book around the very core of his exploration of the mysterious relations between nature and spirit and of the psychical process of the synthetic union of the opposition between nature and spirit in the form of the death-

3 Cf. L. Stapleton, op. cit., pp. 198-9; Mar. 28, 1859.
and-rebirth cycle, ever recurrent at various stages of man's life, and came to make such a real and original contribution to thought and literature. We should pay special attention to the symbolic myth of the "higher" spiritual experience in the synthetic unity of his spiritual life, of an ever-recurrent integral perfection, presented as such in *Walden*.

In the two years that he spent there at Walden did Thoreau carry out the experiment in the simple economy, giving himself to the contemplation of the nature he loved, reading the books he took there with him, and writing a great deal of his first book, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (1849). More important still was the fact that at Walden he gained a mass of literary material for *Walden* itself. It is noteworthy, however, that the great work was made up out of the material from his journals dating from 1838 to 1854. To put it in another way, the book is a record or history (*Geschichte* in the proper sense of the term) of his spiritual growth for sixteen years, just as the *Week* was his spiritual record of the ten-year interval between 1839 and 1849.

As he had learnt that man needed nature, through the wood-using pencil manufacture, which his father began when Henry was six and came to call "Thoreau & Sons," he was very much concerned with the dualism of spirit and nature, and with the influence of nature on mankind. His primary concern, however, was not with the effect of nature on the human economy, but the unique rôle played by nature in the education of the human mind (spirit). We should notice in this connection that Thoreau's primary business was not to change the world and make it better but to change himself and make himself better. He seems to have believed that man could move from ignorance to knowledge by reducing the material embodiments of his life from complexities to simplicities. He sought in this sense a dialectical synthesis of the simple material life and the complex spiritual life. Though Concord was relatively

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free of the evils of industrialism of his day, yet Thoreau found the souls of his townsmen enslaved in their efforts to gain luxuries of civilization. In order to avoid the fate of his fellowmen for himself, when the Shakers insisted upon "the gift to be simple,"1 did he consider salvation here on earth to be found in "rigid economy."2 Finiteness and changeableness, he seems to have considered, do belong to man's life. "A man has not everything to do, but something," says he in "Civil Disobedience" (1849), and in his letter of March 27, 1848, he writes to H. G. O. Blake: "Simplify the problem of life, distinguish the necessary and the real."3 His slogan in Walden is "Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity!" (82) The programs of his activity in rigid economy may be summarized in the following two aspects: (a) the positive one: concentration of activity upon the attainment of the clear goal in sight, i.e., self-culture; (b) the negative: elimination or minimizing of all activity removed from the goal.4

"The poor student," he says in Walden, "studies and is taught only political economy, while the economy of living which is synonymous with philosophy is not even sincerely professed in our colleges" (46; Thoreau's italics). The word "economy" may be used in the sense of the organization, internal constitution, apportionment of functions, of any complex unity.5 A perceptive critic and scholar also notices that the law of simplicity is equivalent to the law of unity.6 It is of vital importance, I think, for us to notice that Thoreau went to Walden Pond in order to simplify and organize his life by reducing it to its essentials, and that he made the law of economy, the doctrine of simplicity, his transcendental principle of life, the formula for his existential activity. As he says in Walden:

2 Cf. T. Dreiser, op. cit., p. 149.
I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and, if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or if it were sublime, to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion (81–2).\(^1\)

It is vital for our understanding of *Walden*’s sublime meaning that we should pay close attention here to the mystical, or I would say, mystifying aspect that was always part of his tenet of economy, which was none other than his assertion of unity—an ontological unity of spirit and matter, soul and body, self and nature, the conscious and the unconscious, for the realization of his soul’s ideal of integral perfection. This mystical aspect of his doctrine of economy (simplicity), I do believe, is more important for our understanding of *Walden*’s symbolic meaning than the one-sided cognition of the mere physical implications of the economic use of one’s time, energy, and material, and of cutting down one’s needs to a minimum. Investigations along this line, I do hope, will help to provide a deeper insight into the thought-content of *Walden*.

Thoreau’s philosophy of economy as criticism of industrial and commercial civilization, which was almost entirely restricted to the materialistic aspect of human life, is related to the background of the leading ideas and experiments of the American followers of such “utopian” socialists, as Fourier, Owen, arising out of an expanding capitalism in the eighteen-fifties, for instance, such an experiment with a community at Brook Farm.\(^2\) In sharp contrast

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\(^1\) Cf. T. Dreiser, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

to those ideas and experiments, profoundly religious, moral, and aesthetic was Thoreau’s doctrine of and experiment in a transcendental, or, if you like, metaphysical economy. For it was, in a wide meaning of the term, a transcendental principle to control a purposeful mode of man’s living and thinking, and at the same time it supplied a key to the understanding of the complete psychic union of the opposition between spirit and nature in order for a man to win a new and lofty existence. To repeat, Thoreau preferred a unified world of inward experience to the multiple universe of modern times. “Change is change. No new life occupies the old bodies;—they decay. It is born, and grows, and flourishes,” says he with reference to the death of the individual as a return to the immanent creativity of nature. He wished to “go into an infant’s body.” To put it in another way, he wished to “change” (verändern), i.e., to die first and then to be reborn in order to attain the integration of his personality and revitalize himself in an effort to build a cosmos of his own creation, “a higher society,” to use another expression in his journal on February 8, 1857.

Thoreau, who had read the German philosopher, Zimmermann, on The Influence of Solitude on the Heart, was no misanthrope, no mere recluse, certainly not one to hate his fellowman. He was no romantic escapist, either. As he was an extremest individualist, having a Nietzschean contempt for the “gregariousness,” it was of necessity for him to become single, as the “Single One” in the highest sense, or the “Unique One,” to use Stirner’s term, and to be content with pure loneliness in the whole world, so that he might begin the quest for the profound mystery of nature and himself. He is quoted as having written as follows: “It is for the purpose...of holding mysterious converse with the soul of nature, that

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1 Cf. T. Dreiser, op. cit., pp. 159-60; letter to H. G. O. Blake, Mar. 27, 1848, in L. Lane, op. cit., p. 13.  
2 Cf. L. Lane, op. cit., p. 61.  
every great poet is a lover of solitude."1 Through such love of solitude does he express his renunciation of the world, mundane affairs, and of its mechanical hold over his own soul, suggesting his ultimate preference for the mystical over the scientific, for the dark and mysterious over the logical and material, at least before 1838. Thus he lived single in "an actual and joyful intercourse with" the soul of nature, diving deep into his own soul to discover himself and seek and attempt the creation of his own cosmos. Although his primary concern was not with God but man, to him man without the spirit was not man. When he stood in a vital relationship to Nature, i.e., the soul of nature, he became aware of the mysterious relations between himself and the things in nature and of the existence of "a Universal Intelligence"2 in nature through the supra-rational intuition, by means of which he was united with the Divine Being. Also he realized that he possessed a double nature, the spiritual and the wild, as we shall see in detail later on. He dived deeper and deeper into himself and became aware of the wild (the unconscious), which was in conflict with the spiritual, and he strove to reach a fully concrete synthesis in which the opposition of them was completely reconciled for the integral perfection of his self.

"The fact is I am a mystic, a transcendentalist, and a natural philosopher to boot,"3 says he himself, and his friend, Bronson Alcott, confirms it as well, saying, "He is less thinker than observer; a naturalist in tendency but of a mystic habit."4 Though he may have been no mystic in any exact sense of the term, such as Eckhart, Ruysbroeck, or Suso, some call him nature mystic. For he came to be one with Nature,5 as primitive man did, devoting himself to the contemplation of the nature he loved, and seeking

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3 Cf. L. Stapleton, op. cit., p. 95; journal of Mar. 5, 1853.
5 Nature mysticism is the sense of being immersed in the oneness of nature, so that man feels all the individuality, all the peculiarity of natural things in himself.
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the perfect union of himself with the ultimate Reality therein. Meeting the Real is the most immediate mystical experience of intrinsic value. There are moments of inspiration and intuition in which one looks into the world-order by a supra-rational intuition, direct, synthetic and timeless. These moments are eternal, but most transitory of all. One can secure no content from them, but the eternal source of power streams into the soul of man, leaving an indelible impression there, and he is ever and anon reminded of them. There is not one realm of spirit and another of nature, but there is only the realm of Reality. What we call spirit and what we call nature equally come from the Real that is beyond and within us. The realm of the Real reaches its fulness in the synthetic union of spirit and nature, of subject and object. In seeking this sort of perfect union of his spirit and nature did Thoreau study the mystical writings of the East, such as Manu and the Bhagavad-Gita of Lord Krishna, as well as the Pythagorean and the Orphic writings. He lived like the Brahmans, alone in the whole world in relation to the Spirit and not in society with his fellowmen. In the chapter on "Solitude" in Walden does he express his awareness of the mysterious intimacy of the ultimate Real, which Joseph Wood Krutch calls "the Paradise Found at Walden":

In the midst of a gentle rain... I was suddenly sensible of such sweet and beneficent society in Nature, in the very pattering of the drops, and in every sound and sight around my house, an infinite and unaccountable friendliness all at once like an atmosphere sustaining me, as made the fancied advantages of human neighborhood insignificant, and I have never thought of them since. Every little pine needle expanded and swelled with sympathy and befriended me. I was so distinctly made aware of the presence of something kindred to me, even in scenes which we are accustomed to call wild and dreary, and also that the nearest of blood to me and humanest was not a person nor a villager, that I thought no place could ever be strange to me again (119-20).

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2 Cf. T. Dreiser, op. cit., p. 96-7. Italics mine. Such feelings of "expansion" are very common in Indian mysticism.
One may well consider Thoreau to have been attempting to have a mystical experience not unakin to that of a yogi. Indeed, this does refer to the nature-mystic's firsthand experience of being conscious of the influx of a serene and unquestionable wisdom and of finding peace in the presence of Nature's great, calm, and "passionless power." This direct encounter with the ultimate Real expresses the overwhelming sense of freedom which Thoreau experienced in the living Presence, irradiated by its power and light, suggesting to us his pure mysticism from Oriental philosophy. It would seem as if he had met "some grand serene, immortal, infinitely encouraging, though invisible, companion, and walked with him," as he expresses in a different shape the same sort of awareness of the Presence in the journal on January 7, 1857. One can never feel lonely in so creative an hour as this, when he enters into a real relationship to Spirit, with such insight into the reality of the divine-human meeting. It is noteworthy in this connection that Thoreau's experience with time, as a phase of Nature, was closely related to the present; that this quest for the mysterious relation between himself and nature consisted in the immediate perception of eternity; that his experience was not primarily physical but psychical and inward. To repeat, above all else, he found his eternity "in each moment," in the fulness of this earthly present, i.e., he lived "in the present."2

The source of his mystic ecstasies was his sharp senses, as in the case of Wordsworth's naturalistic and artistic activity. We may well consider the sense-perception equivalent to the faculty of sense-intuition. He writes in the journal entry of April 9, 1841: "How much virtue there is in simply seeing!"3 and on September 13, 1852, he writes: "Carlyle said that how to observe was to look, but I say that it is rather to see, and the more you look the less you will observe."4 One may wonder what is the difference between

1 Cf. L. Stapleton, op. cit., p. 155.
3 Cf. L. Stapleton, op. cit., p. 5.
4 Cf. ibid., p. 92.
“to see” and “to look.” By implication his nature study seems to have been characteristic of the deep, concentrated intuitive nature of his observation, i.e., of the symbolic reading of Nature by means of the imaginative faculty, which had a spontaneity, instinctiveness, and non-reflectiveness. He writes elsewhere: “He (Man) must look through and beyond her (Nature).” Indeed, he was a keen and delicate observer of external nature—a genuine observer. He was gifted with the Indian accuracy of sight; to be sure, his keen eyes could see in the night, so that he could find his way through the woods and fields in the densest night, as is indicated in the chapter on “The Village” in Walden (153). He held that scent was “a more primitive inquisition,” “more oracular and trustworthy.” He longed to hear the divine music of the spheres. His ears were so keenly attuned to the music of nature, that sounds unheard by others were easily distinguished by him. He speaks in his journals no less than thirty times of the endless excitement which the humming vibrations of the telegraph wire caused within him. It seemed to him “the sound of a far-off glorious life, a supernal life.” The sweetness of the note of the wood-thrush, in a similar way, was “a fountain of youth” to all his senses. His keen senses, as though a bird or a beast, were a means of realizing correspondence with nature. Indeed, there are some examples of his super-human ability in special sympathy with birds and beasts.

We shall have to consider the meaning of English nature derived from Latin natura translated from Greek phusis. When we regard nature as “Great Mother Nature” or mere mild “Alma Natura,” as Thoreau calls it somewhere, it does not merely mean all things there are, as an aggregate or a system, but rather some force, mind, or élan supposed to be immanent in them. In classical times did people call it the Goddess Demeter and Ceres, but her cult as an Earth-Mother and Corn-Spirit is indeed of much greater antiquity.

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1 Cf. T. Dreiser, op. cit., p. 59.
2 Cf. ibid., pp. 147–8.
Great Mother Nature, or die gute Mutter, has never been supposed to betray the heart that loved her.¹

Thoreau’s love of Great Mother Nature was unbound. Never did he weary of her. Whenever he found something uncongenial and prosaic in daily life, he never failed to return to her sweet embrace. The Transcendentalists expressed such devotional love for Nature in terms of European romanticism and Oriental mysticism. It is noteworthy in this connection that such a representative philosopher of German romanticism as Schelling considered the female to be equivalent or similar to the passive, dark, negative, yet fertile womb of Nature. Although Thoreau had not a free use of German, nor had he any enthusiasm for it, yet, I assume, he learned something of German philosophy from Emerson, who was a German idealist, mainly under the influence of Coleridge, as well as a Platonist.

As Thoreau was an excellent classicist, disciplined by the Greek and Latin classics, small wonder he became aware of the Divine Being immanent in nature and wished for the synthetic union of nature and the ever-present Spirit therein in a higher form of experience by the power of intuition, as Schelling, Novalis, Coleridge and other浪漫ists did. For people had been aware of the Spirit immanent in nature ever since classical times. The Oriental Scriptures which Thoreau read in English and French were also a means of learning the *essentia* of nature mysticism, i.e., the experience of direct communion with the Spirit immanent in nature.

It was, however, under the influence of Emerson’s transcendental philosophy of “the Over-Soul” that Thoreau felt that he could “walk even with the Builder of the universe” (293). Nature was regarded as Spinoza’s *natura naturans*, as well as *natura naturata*; Nature’s life, as Emerson had shown, was the immanent spirit of

God, every natural phenomenon being an "image of God" that revealed the World Spirit (Welt-seele) immanent therein. Thoreau experienced Nature as others did religion. His "nature religion" consisted in his continuous correspondence with the Over-Soul in nature. Thoreau, as well as Alcott and Emerson, had a kind of faith in Nature, a faith that was rather childlike, having a profound passion to Nature, a kindly Being, in the solitude of Walden Pond, as a child loves and trusts in his tenderly loving mother. The passage found in the beginning section of the chapter on "Solitude" indicates his intense love for Nature: "the whole body . . . imbibes delight through every pore" (117). True, he was never such a metaphysician as to dogmatize about Nature, but, participating in the serenity of nature, and sharing the happiness of the river and the woods, he found that he increased his physical energy, intellectual awareness and moral steadfastness, having his creative power renewed for his hard literary work.

We should pay close attention here to Thoreau's type of metaphorization of the symbolizable relations between nature and spirit, for his intuition was magnetized, as a critic has remarked, by reading in the "Book of Nature," the "hieroglyphics" of invisible things, like the writers of the seventeenth century. The basic necessary conditions of his mystical, aesthetic experience was to decipher the inner meanings of the symbols or types which expressed his thoughts and feelings in natural objects and phenomena. He recognized the symbolic psychical facts by means of the natural things, and copied and represented them, expressing his thought by using a part of the world as symbol in the Journal and Walden and other writings, "through the medium of a deep poetic sensibility," to use George Eliot's remark, for his artistic creation. As he was genuinely a nature poet, a religious poet in

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1 Cf. L. Stapleton, op. cit., p. 194.
2 Cf. T. Dreiser, op. cit., p. 41.
5 Cf. L. Lane, op. cit., p. 43.
temperament, he lived an ascetic life, disciplined by the classics and by manual labor, studying Nature objectively by means of all his senses and a direct intuition, for rich symbolic readings in her.

Nature is considered a vital part of man, and conversely man is regarded as an essential part of her. In other words, man is essentially related to all of Nature. Within this concrete unity of man and Nature, she finds something analogous to herself in human nature, and man finds in her some symbols of his thoughts and feelings.\(^1\) Because of the organic unity of the physical fact and spiritual content, metaphor should be interpreted to mean that physical fact and ideal content are two phases of one whole.

Here I should like to see the remarkable doubleness of the spirit, i.e., the conscious and the unconscious. "The unconsciousness of man is the consciousness of God, the end of the world," says Thoreau in the journal on February 13, 1840.\(^2\) We can find another reference to an "unconscious life" in the journal of August 30, 1856: "A conscious and an unconscious life are good. Neither is good exclusively, for both have the same source."\(^3\) There is very slight doubt that he did not know such a fact for psychology of our own time, as the conscious as against the unconscious, yet nevertheless this point of view offers a very good ground for interpreting Walden's hidden meanings. The unconscious is the source of consciousness itself, as everyone knows, and the source of all power and possibility. "The bases of all life," C. G. Carus says, "is the Divine (das Göttliche), which for us cannot be fully grasped on the analogy of a human intelligence, but only as what to us is purely unconscious." For Schelling, all nature was "ein bewusstloses Denken" (an unconscious Thinking) and for Carus himself, "the unconscious is the subjective expression for that which we know objectively under the name of 'Nature.'"\(^4\) Such a eu-

\(^1\) Cf. "But I forget that you think more of this human nature than of this nature I praise." (Dreiser, op. cit., p. 37.)

\(^2\) Cf. L. Stapleton, op. cit., p. 2.

\(^3\) Cf. ibid., p. 142.

phemism as 'a call of nature' attests that the unconscious vital powers in a man's body can be nature. To pursue the Divine within us, in this sense, is the unfolding of the unconscious to consciousness, i.e., the symbolization (metaphorization) of the dream-world.

It is said that from the Enlightenment came Romanticism, and from Romanticism, an upsurge from the neglected unconscious, came first the activity and imagery, then the idea and the name itself, of the unconscious. Romanticism revived several ancient myths, including the universal unity and the *Anima Mundi*, the Night, the Unconscious and the Dream. The unconscious is for Jung a *Grenzbegriff* (a boundary concept), which was employed by Kant to describe the very concept of God.¹

The Structure and the Meaning of *Walden*

In this paper my attention is entirely devoted to the analysis of *Walden's* general structure of thought and its symbolic spectrum whereby Thoreau reformed himself into an inner dream of the dialectical process of spiritual change (rebirth), in terms of a synchronous 'correspondence theory' of the psychological concept of the conscious and the unconscious as psychic structures and the idealistic conception of spirit and nature, that particular pair of mutually relative opposites, which necessarily interconnect, because they are phases of Spirit's pure activity; that is to say, in them the activity of Spirit is immanent and constitutive. It should not escape our notice here in this connection that the juxtaposition or parallelization of these two apparently unrelated systems is not a purely hypothetical theory but it is to be considered a means to see this work of Thoreau in their proper native interconnection as expressing the integral phases of the myth-forming psychic activity itself. It is of vital importance for us to establish a relation between these two aspects of a totally different type in order to grasp the symbolic meaning of *Walden* as a literary expression of

¹ Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 54-61.
the author's attempt to shape his principle of life—an assertion of the spiritual change through the death-and-life cycle and the necessity for gaining a spiritual victory in the midst of a world of harassing circumstances.

The natural process, as illustrated by the developing seasons from summer to spring which Thoreau describes by putting the experience of his two years at the pond into a single year, is interpreted to be both the circular flow of time and the fable or myth of the circular movement of Great Mother Nature. As has been attempted to explain roughly and generally, Thoreau constructs his symbolic myth whereby he represents his inner dream of the dialectical process of the spiritual change, the death-and-resurrection cycle, in his entire life history from youth to manhood: the first spring, the dewy, pure, auroral season of the Olympian life, is symbolic of his youth, and the subsequent seasons and the second spring are the record of the growth of the conscious and of his attempt to reach his spring of awakened spiritual life. He built his hut symbolical of his self to meet the seasons which symbolized the development of consciousness. Summer represented the time when man was alive in all his senses; autumn, the concentration of consciousness; and winter, self-reflection. This spiritual
development corresponded to the seasons of history. In "The American Scholar," Emerson, Henry’s philosophic father, had noticed, "I believe each individual passes through all three [i.e., the Classic, the Romantic, and the Reflective or Philosophical age]. The boy is a Greek; the youth, romantic; the adult, reflective." Spring was, so to say, the Golden Age associated with the time of heroic endeavor. Therefore, Thoreau’s first spring at the pond was full of allusions to Greece, and Homer was the scripture for his morning meditation, and the second spring led him to read Ovid’s Metamorphoses. Such a conception of spiritual development and the concept of metaphorization (symbolization) constitute the key natural symbolism apparently present in Walden, which is a nature myth as well as a narrative account of an episode in the author’s life. These concepts, therefore, should be employed as motives as far as relevant for this myth interpretation.

The chapter, “Where I Lived, and What I Lived For,” contains the author’s morning philosophy, and the chapter on "Sounds," its account of “a reverie” (dream, vision). In this wise, the day reflects the cycle of the seasons of the year on a small scale (269), symbolizing the organic process of change from spiritual sleep (death) to awakening (rebirth), the coming of inspiration, and the like.

Walden contains two myths, i.e., of entry into nature and of renewal of life through nature, suggesting that man be spiritually reborn by uniting his spirit with nature. Thoreau’s myth of entering nature constitutes the first part, ending with the chapter on “The Ponds,” and his myth of rebirth (renewal) through nature constitutes the second part extending from “Baker Farm” to “Spring,” and the third part is “Conclusion.” The first part contains six essays. Taken in pairs, “Reading” contrasts with “Sounds,” “Solitude” with “Visitors,” and “The Bean-Field”

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with "The Village," always significantly. The first three take us more and more into nature from the world of man; in the second three, the point of view having reversed, the readers are now within nature, looking back at the world of man from a further remove.¹

In order to recover of such alienation from the world of man, Thoreau participated in the process of Nature by hoeing beans, and renewed his intimacy with Nature. Its main purpose, no doubt, was paying his way. As we proceed to interpret the symbolic meaning of *Walden*, we feel justified in *analogizing* the essential ego with the pond (symbol of the womb of Nature), following Jung’s way of poetic explication.² According to the chapter on "The Ponds," which is the keystone of the arch of *Walden*’s artistic form, the pond itself was symbolic of the deep internal reality of Nature and of the author’s soul, and the shore of the pond, the external structure of nature and of his psyche. "I cannot come nearer to God and Heaven/Than I live to Walden even./I am its stony shore,/And the breeze that passes o’er;/ . . . And its deepest resort/Lies high in my thought " (175). There he described the remarkable purity, depth, and transparency of the pond, and compares the pond to the very window of the soul, referring to the "Sky water," i.e., the water to reflect the "sky" or "heaven" symbolic of the Deity (170), and the "earth’s eye," i.e., Great Mother Nature’s eye (168). In order to understand Thoreau’s realistic symbolism, with which *Walden* is packed, his readers need to see the individual elements of the symbolized materialization, such as the pond, trees and sky reflected therein, as overlying symbols in the myth of spiritual awakening, and then look into the world of mythical ideation beyond them, establishing the full value of this symbolization. Such double vision will enable them to interpret certain recurring elements of the nature myth presented as such in *Walden*. The study of this kind of symboliza-

¹ Cf. Lauriat Lane, Jr., "On the Organic Structure of Walden"; Lane, *op. cit.*, pp. 78–9.
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...tion will permit the readers to see that Thoreau’s rite of baptism in the pond, for example, signifies no more and no less than the symbolic expression of his spiritual rebirth by means of Nature. For the pond simply means Great Mother Nature’s womb and the hero’s ego by analogy with it. The spiritual rebirth of the ego (the fall into and emerging from the water of the womb of Nature) should be renewed every day. The mystic’s (the spirit’s) life by the pond directly signifies the process of spiritual awakening (rebirth), as it is surrounded by nature. In September or October, Walden Pond became “a perfect forest mirror,” reflecting all natural phenomena perfectly as if the mystic’s clear mind. It was Thoreau’s “true skylight,” to use a different expression in the journal on January 7, 1857.1 Its bottom was “pure sand,” with the sediment from the decay of the fallen leaves (162); “a bright green weed,” symbol of life, could be found growing there even in midwinter (162); and its “ascetic fish” (161) were . . . “much cleaner, handsomer, and firmer” (167). He described night-fishing: “communicating by a long flaxen line with mysterious nocturnal fishes which had their dwelling forty feet below” (159) the dark water of the pond. Fish and fishing were for him symbols of thought and contemplation. One might remember in this connection that fish was alphabetically associated with the initial letters of the Greek words for “Jesus Christ, Son of God, the Savior,” which could be read acrostically as *ichthys*, and that as such it served in the catacombs to conceal the Christian revelation. It was, however, for Thoreau a natural symbol. He was a nature mystic, indeed, the Izaak Walton of Walden Pond2—symbol of the womb of Nature and also the mystic’s pure ego.

I should like to dwell on the bond of analogy between the unconscious and “the wild” in order to facilitate the understanding of the thematic imagery presented as such in *Walden*. It seems to me that “the unconscious” or the womb of Nature symbolized

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by the pond is analogous to what Thoreau called "the wild" or instinctive life, which suggested "a vast and undeveloped nature which men have not recognized" (114). It was, to our surprise, none other than the existence of the unconscious spheres of mind and nature that Thoreau was keenly aware of. In the essay on "Walking," he writes, "Ben Jonson exclaims,—'How near to good is what is fair!' So I would say,—How near to good what is wild!' (615; Thoreau's italics) When his hunger for the wild, such as represented above, was realized in his life in the woods, that mode of life was set over against the civilized life. In the same essay he writes:

The story of Romulus and Remus being suckled by a wolf is not a meaningless fable. The founders of every state which has risen to eminence have drawn their nourishment and vigor from a similar wild source [i.e., Alma Natura]. It was because the children of the Empire were not suckled by the wolf that they were conquered and displaced by the children of the northern forests who were (613).

The Romulus saga cannot be discussed in detail here in this connection, but it is of much significance that Thoreau refers to the ancient myth of the twin (symbol of the unity of life flow), to whom a Roman "she-wolf" as the lowly helpful mother—probably symbol of Great Mother Nature—gave her teats to nurse. Thoreau knew that the health of civilization needed "the tonic of wildness" (283), "that all things be mysterious and unexplorable, that land and sea be infinitely wild, unsurveyed, and unfathomed by us because unfathomable" (283).

The opening section of "Baker Farm" with which his myth of spiritual rebirth begins refers to his religious communion with and consecration by nature like the Druids who worshiped in their oaks symbolical of Nature. After regarding himself as a priest in this wise, Thoreau related the need for spiritual regenera-

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tion to John Field, the overworked, overfed, discouraged Irish day laborer, during the hour he sought shelter from the storm in John’s cabin (181–6).

For Thoreau, a vegetarian, meat was a symbol of evil, sensuality; its tainting symbolic of goodness and affection corrupted, chastity defiled. In the chapter on “Higher Laws,” however, he confessed: “As I came home through the woods... it being now quite dark, I caught a glimpse of a woodchuck stealing across my path, and felt a strange thrill of savage delight, and was strongly tempted to seize and devour him raw...” (189). “Thoreau once ate a woodchuck,” writes E. B. White. So does R. W. B. Lewis.¹ Thoreau found in himself “an instinct toward a higher, or, spiritual life, and another toward a primitive rank and savage one” (189).² In other words, he was conscious of an animal in him, which awoke in proportion as his higher nature slumbered (197). It seemed as if his had been a peculiarly wild nature, which so yearned toward all wildness.³ He moved to and fro between the spiritual (the conscious) and the wild (the unconscious). The chapter on “Higher Laws,” as a whole, contains his philosophical observations on the dramatic clash of the conscious with the unconscious, spirit with nature. Though he was aware of the existence of the latent wild force of his own nature and the natural world, yet he did not consider the force evil. Melville’s attitude toward nature in this connection was skeptical, but Thoreau’s was optimistic, as is common to the mystics.

As Thoreau’s heart was so aflame with longing for higher spiritual life and self-purification, under the influence of Eastern mysticism, such as Brahmanism, from which he learnt that his own self (ātman) should return to Brahmān (the World Spirit) by a process of progressive elimination, he “got up early and bathed in the pond,” as it was his own religious exercise (80), his own

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² T. Dreiser, op. cit., p. 73.
"sacrament" or communion, his own ritual of purification. It was, so to say, an "outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace" (62). He purified himself in the strength-giving waters of the pond to be changed into the archetypal Nature man. He became a vegetarian, as has been remarked, and ate no flesh except for an occasional meal of Walden fish, he drank no wine, he never used tobacco, and gave up coffee and tea. In *Walden*, he says, "I believe that every man who has ever been earnest to preserve his higher or poetic faculties in the best condition has been particularly inclined to abstain from animal food, and from much food of any kind" (193). His single purpose of self-purification or self-renunciation which lay at the root of his aesthetic experience was to maintain pure and innocent relations with Nature. He was "all purity and goodness personified," as Sophia Hawthorne convincingly gave testimony, 2 "His Alpine purity, his diamond truth, his stainless sincerity" were "immortal beauties in him." 2 Indeed, he found incessant labor with the hands and the mind in order to avoid idleness. A remarkably significant passage, that may strike the twentieth-century ear as excessively Puritanical, draws our attention:

The generative energy, which, when we are loose, dissipates and makes us unclean, when we are continent invigorates and inspires us. Chastity is the flowering of man; and what are called Genius, Heroism, Holiness, and the like, are but various fruits which succeed it. Man flows at once to God when the channel of purity is open (197).

His assertion upon the sublimation of man’s natural vital powers, especially his dynamic sexual force, up to a higher level, suggests an acquired Puritanism or an ascetic strain derived from his Oriental studies. It would be an unfair modern criticism of his praiseworthy sincerity and endeavor, if we judge his asceticism to be none other than a sort of escapism or nonhumanization, because it was a way for him to reconcile the dualistic struggle or the two

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impulses of his own nature for the purpose of artistic creation.

Thoreau’s asceticism was neither purely Christian nor economic. The artist needed spiritual purity (sanctification in his sense) to enjoy divining Nature’s divine mystery, her fine flavors, her beauties, and to make his own impulse toward immortality like her own. As it was orthodox Transcendentalism to regard Nature as both temple and logos, the loafer’s “idleness,” his gospel of leisure, had at least the sanction of the Transcendentalist friends. For to Thoreau “a broad margin of leisure” was “as beautiful in a man’s life as in a book,”¹ and it was nothing “but opportunity for more complete and entire action.”¹ He had no worldly ambitions whatsoever; he never contemplated marriage; he had no desire for the luxuries which most men craved. Like the Scholar Gypsy, he awaited a divine spark from heaven. Was it what Meister Eckhart called “Seelen-fünklein”? Emerson compared him to a man living in the hope to gather the Alpine flower called by the Switzers Edelweiss, symbol of noble purity,² and indeed his habitual delight was in the presence of whatever form of beauty addressed his senses. It was a sort of austere Epicureanism, we might well say, that he preached. He rejected the doctrinal assumptions of the Puritans, but he retained their horror of sensuality, being “a real Christian,” as Louisa May Alcott convincingly remarked.³ As he says somewhere, “My profession is to be always on the alert to find God in nature, to know his lurking places . . . ,”⁴ Thoreau looked for God in the temple not made with hands, educated under the influence of Hegelian theory of the reflection of natural mind in nature in the intellectual climate of New England. In this sense, he was far from the collective (social) worship of the Creator of the world. Although he valued renunciation to enjoy Nature, yet he did not reject “the wild” for its own sake. It was good and innocent

² Cf. W. Harding, op. cit., pp. 9, 50; L. Lane, op. cit., p. 45.
⁴ Quoted in Michael F. Moloney, “Christian Malgré Lui,” in Lane, op. cit., p. 64.
for him. The longing he had for the wild or the animal in himself, as it were, the *Mysterium Tremendum*, and the strenuous effort to purify himself were two powerful and opposing drives. This doubleness of his nature and the "individual" awareness of the two impulses within his own self as creative artist and his will to objectify and eternalize it, seem to me to have been the real causes of his ambivalence and consequent alienation from "collective" religious faith.

To return to the subject proper, the winter sections, from "House-Warming" through "The Pond in Winter," prepare symbolically for Thoreau’s "Spring." Anticipating the coming of winter, toward the end of summer he began to build his chimney and fireplace (symbols of "the soul" purified by fire), an "independent structure, standing on the ground and rising through the house to the heavens" (217). "I withdrew yet farther into my shell," he wrote, "and endeavored to keep a bright fire both within my house and within my breast" (223–4). This winter death and the expectancy of spring parallel the deaths of *Walden's* "Former Inhabitants" and the sweet-scented flowers of vivacious lilac growing "in front-yard plots—now standing by wall-sides in retired pastures" (236). Thoreau’s "Winter Visitors" were those best suited for such a time of isolation and spiritual renewal: farmer (Edmund Hosmer), poet (William Ellery Channing), philosopher (Amos Bronson Alcott), and "the Visitor who never comes" (242), the last suggesting his longing for some sort of communication with God. The quiet discussion of "Winter Animals" marks the low point of the mythical cycle, which moves again upward to the spiritual eminence. "The Pond in Winter" shows again "that this pond was made deep and pure for a symbol" (256); and it ends with the visions of the coming of spring to Walden and of the author’s symbolic meeting with "the servant of the Bramin, priest of Brahma and Vishnu and Indra," (266) their buckets, as it were, grating together in the same well.

The chapter on "Spring" contains two passages from the first book of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, as has been remarked. The
brilliant description of the thaw, a myth of the organic creation of nature, that invests chaos with order (cosmos) in the circular flow of Nature's life, is connected with the myth of Ovid, wherein a marvellous transformation of nature is described. It was really a metaphor of spiritual rebirth for Thoreau. Ancient myths, such as Ovid's, agree that matter first existed in a state of disorder (chaos) and was ordered and worked up into a kosmos. The cosmos can then be called nature and contrasted with the preceding disorder. Hence Milton describes chaos as "the womb of Nature."¹

It is noteworthy in this connection that Thoreau explores every phase and type of decay, suggesting that Nature is unmoral: the sea-coast with its wrecks, decaying trees, the vulture feeding on the carrion, a dead horse, and the like, and finally he comes to conclude that all the universe is innocent (283–4).² The natural process of death and renewal (creation) in the vegetable as well as the animal kingdom involves a deep relation with the basic "types already in the mind of man" (276), especially the death-and-rebirth process of the creation of cosmos out of chaos, including the decay of natural objects, by the urge of the divine Idea. This concept of the identification (correspondence) of external nature with the divine Idea and consequent creation, so to say, the soul-nature-concept, is expressed in a different shape in Walden:

No wonder that the earth expresses itself outwardly in leaves, it so labors with the idea inwardly. The atoms have already learned this law, and are pregnant by it. The overhanging leaf sees here its prototype (273).³

Really he tried to glimpse Nature's laws, that his "mood" might find its "perfect correspondence," in her every phenomenon, by his participating in her soul, becoming one with her, and creating something new from out of his new "individual" nature. He

² See also Dreiser, op. cit., pp. 83–4.
³ See also ibid., p. 38.
asked for perfect freedom—free activity of his creative power in the awareness of an urge to self-assertion. In the most earnest efforts of his self-creative personality to crystallize and eternalize the idea of his genius, he consciously and unconsciously fused World and Self, Nature and Spirit in a single whole. His concept of Self expanded until he asked for elbowroom. It is important for us to notice in this connection what he writes in relation to expansion (self-creation):

I have no more distinctness or pointedness in my yearnings than an expanding bud, which does indeed point to flower and fruit, to summer and autumn, but is aware of the warm sun and spring influence only. I feel ripe for something, yet do nothing, can't discover what that thing is. I feel fertile merely.¹

This pregnant passage in the journal entry of November 16, 1850, suggests in terms of nature symbols none other than his deep longing for the creation of cosmos out of chaos and the realization of self-expansion (self-creation) by the power of genius. The repeated expression of this primal self-creation through the idea of genius (gignere = to beget) seems worth mentioning in this connection. He writes elsewhere with reference to the notions of Art and Genius as follows:

The Man of Genius . . . is an originator, an inspired or demonic man, who produces a perfect work in obedience to laws yet unexplored.²

This idea of "Genius" or the genius-notion, wherein dwells the divine "spark," in its mythical origin, is a representation of the immortal soul, that part of the creative artist who can produce an immortal work of art. We should pay special attention to the idea of genius Thoreau conceived with reference to his artistic creation of the nature-myth in the form of such an artistic achievement as Walden.

² Cf. Dreiser, op. cit., p. 142.
So far as this interpretation of the nature-myth is concerned, the mysterious linkage of the self to Nature forms the central problem of *Walden*. The self is not merely what we call the empirical ego of psychology but the actual hero of much of early 19th-century Romantic literature. We know that the unity of the world of truth and beauty is one thing and the pluralism of the world of action is another. After all is said and done, however, the conflict between the unity of the ideal world and the pluralism of the world of action should be reconciled by means of something like the power of genius working, under the aesthetic law of "intuition," with an inward urge to self-creation.

*Walden* seems to me to be read as Thoreau’s "nature-myth" symbolic of his own and man’s everlasting quest for the unity of his spiritual dualism—an existential and aesthetic unity of the conscious with the unconscious, Spirit and Nature, Self and World. Thoreau, as has repeatedly been remarked, hungered for the synthetic unity of the dualism in his nature, the intellectual, the spiritual and the mystic, the nebulous, transforming the creative "art-impulse" from the dualistic conflict into the literary achievement of high aesthetic value in the very characteristic form of the nature-myth, which had been handed down from age to age by means of mystic tradition.

It was when he became one with Nature in his direct communion with the spiritual force which created the world at Walden that he discovered the primitive ground of his existence and attained spiritual renewal, possessing the original wholeness of his creative personality, and consequently finding reality. Now he was confident that he would overcome his obstacles in the midst of his real social life. "I learned this, at least, by my experiment:" he

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1 This is to be confirmed by various passages from his journals; for example, "Some incidents in my life . . . have been like myths or passages in a myth, rather than mere incidents of history which have to wait to become significant. Quite in harmony with my subjective philosophy." See Dreiser, *op. cit.*, p. 54. Some other examples: Stapleton, pp. 22-3; 27; 73; 173: Nov. 16, 1850; Feb. 9, 1851; Nov. 9, 1851; Nov. 20, 1857.
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wrote, "that if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours" (288). He had "built castles in the air." Now he had to "put the foundations [both philosophical and aesthetic] under them" (288), as the result of his meaningful experience in discovering his own integrity. The passage expressing the real significance of his existential protest against the objective reality is, I think, the following proclamation:

"In view of the future of possible, we should live quite laxly and undefined in front, our outlines dim and misty on that side; as our shadows reveal an insensible perspiration toward the sun" (289).

* This essay has grown out of the paper I read in Japanese in the centenary commemorative program sponsored by the American Literature Society of Japan (Professor Saburo Yamaya, President) on May 19, 1962, at Hosei University, Tokyo. The other valuable contributions to the study of Thoreau were made by Professors Hikaru Saito, Masyoshi Higashiyama and Tokihiko Yamazaki on their respective subjects: Thoreau's *Journal*, his Politics, and the like.